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The Hegemony Handbook: Exploiting the Space between War and Peace

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Executive Summary

Our adversaries are taking an integrated approach to countering American military power. In particular, they are employing Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) systems, sub-threshold actions, and information campaigns as part of a mutually reinforcing strategy. This strategy can disrupt the international order by increasing the political costs on our allies while making us appear weak and ineffective because we cannot stop these short-of-war actions.

The A2AD systems increase the risk to our conventional forces, thereby reducing their perceived value in peacetime. The sub-threshold actions create tensions and friction points, causing aggravation for our allies and making the United States appear weak, since we cannot easily resolve them. This sends a signal that, despite the United States' conventional deterrence, our adversaries really hold the power. The adversaries' internally focused information campaigns (i.e., propaganda, using 21st century methods) serve to insulate them from internal political costs. The externally focused information campaigns impose political costs on us and our allies by sowing distrust between the leadership and the electorate (or key constituents) or between different members of an alliance. In the end, this constrains our leadership's ability to respond by increasing the political costs of potential courses of action.

The end result is that our adversaries' strategy incentivizes regional actors to align with them instead of with the United States. This is particularly troubling because our military is designed to be expeditionary and depends on infrastructure located within our allied and partner nations.

Therefore, despite our superior conventional deterrence, our adversaries can hold the advantage, short of war. With this set of pernicious activities, they can reshape the geopolitical landscape without needing to challenge our conventional military power.

We propose that countering this linkage requires the military to be able to create political consequences for our adversaries. If the military can create political effects, the National Command Authority can use that leverage to strike private agreements with our adversaries to follow international norms.

Contents

A. Who Owns the Peace?

The basic military objective in any and all operational domains is "To assure freedom of access at times and places of our choosing to deliver the desired effects."[1] The National Military Strategy highlights that future success will increasingly depend on how well the military supports other instruments of power and enable allies and partners. A key aspect is our ability to control the escalation of conflict. The capabilities needed to control escalation are under continuing and growing threat[2] while becoming increasingly important to maintaining international norms.

To that end, Russia, China, and others are using their Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2AD) systems, sub-threshold actions, and information campaigns[3] in an integrated manner to advance their interests and undermine international norms. Their approach leverages their military as an instrument of power in these short-of-war conflicts,[4] but, despite our conventional advantage, the United States does not have an effective response to these actions.[5]

The Department of Defense (DoD) is individually examining and attempting to identify counters to the challenges of A2AD systems,[6] sub-threshold actions,[7] and

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[1] Private communication, Gen. Larry Welch (Ret.), USAF.

[2] Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security*, June 2015.

[3] Joint Publication 3-13.2, "Military Information Support Operations." January 7, 2010, Incorporating Change 1, December 20, 2011.

[4] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Joseph Dunford described these actions as "adversarial competition with the military dimension short of armed conflict" in his keynote address at the Air Force Association (AFA) Air, Space and Cyber Conference, National Harbor, MD, September 21, 2016, http://www.af.mil/News/AirForceTV.aspx?videoid=484182&videotag=Featured%20Videos &videopage=1&ccenabled=false.

[5] In his AFA speech, CJCS General Dunford indicated that the traditional approach used by the United States is insufficient and that our adversaries know the United States does not have an effective response.

[6] Chuck Hagel, Secretary of Defense, Keynote Speech (presented at the Reagan National Defense Forum, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA, November 15, 2014); Andrew Krepinevich, Barry Watts, and Robert Work, *Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2003); Eric A. Adelizzi et al., "Assessment of the Department of Defense's Ability to Counter Anti-Access and Area-Denial Strategies, Capabilities, and Key Technologies of Potential Adversaries," IDA Report R-419 (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, March 2016).

[7] Joseph L. Votel, Gen., US Army Commander, USSOCOM, Statement Before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, March 18, 2015; Philip Kapusta, Capt., USN, "The Gray Zone," *Special Warfare* 28, no. 4 (October–December 2015): 18–25; Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology and Logistics), Memorandum for Chairman, Defense Science Board, "Terms of Reference – Defense Science Board 2016 Summer Study on

information campaigns.[8] We contribute to the wide-ranging literature by examining the potential outcome and consequences when these three elements are assessed in concert.

Our conclusion is that if A2AD systems, sub-threshold actions, and information campaigns are examined as part of an interlocking strategy, our adversaries can disrupt the international order and undermine our alliances—which underpin the United States' ability to use its military as an instrument of power across the globe—without having to resort to war. Therefore, our adversaries hold the power to reshape the geopolitical landscape while avoiding the risk and costs of war.[9] Our conventional military deterrence—while important for preventing war—is imperfectly structured to arrest this threat. We propose that the military needs to be able to impose political costs on the adversaries and that this leverage can then be used by the National Command Authority to privately coerce these adversaries to follow international norms. We raise a set of questions (in Section C) for the operational community that can be used to determine the merits and feasibility of this idea.

B. Undermining American Military Power

1. How Our Adversaries' Integrated Strategy Works

We believe the adversaries' strategy employs a three-step process to undermine American power[10] and international norms. First, by credibly holding military assets (e.g., the presence of a carrier battle group) at risk, the A2AD systems make the United States

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Capabilities for Constrained Military Operations," November 3, 2015; Nathan P. Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, June 7, 2016).

[8] From Joint Publication 3-13, "Information Operations," November 20, 2014: "the Secretary of Defense now characterizes IO [Information Operations] as the integrated employment, during military operations, of IRCs [Information-Related Capabilities] in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own." We use the term information campaign to denote that these actions by our adversaries are ongoing and continuous. Articles discussing examples include those found at the following Internet locations:

- http://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-50-cent-party-2014-10;
- http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/world/europe/russia-sweden-disinformation.html
- http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.htm; and
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7783640.stm.

[9] Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "The Contested Commons." *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings Magazine* 135, no. 7 (July 2009): 1277. http://www.usni.org /magazines/proceedings/2009-07/contested-commons discusses how our adversaries are incentivized to restructure these "peacetime" contests in a manner that does not allow us to use our advantages.

[10] This does not imply that our conventional deterrence is lost, but rather that our ability to use the military as an instrument of power in peacetime is degraded even though we maintain our conventional deterrence.

less willing to use its power projection capabilities, which reduces their usefulness in reassuring allies and partners.[11] Second, they exploit the reduced credibility by conducting sub-threshold operations, which impose greater political costs on our allies than on the United States. This undermines our military as an instrument of power because we depend on infrastructure and support provided by our allies and partners. Finally, the information campaigns then serve to insulate the adversaries from internal political costs of action[12] while raising the political costs of action on the part of the United States, allies, and partners. This mutually supporting strategy reshapes the geopolitical landscape by leveraging their instruments of power to mute our ability to respond short of war.

Because the increased risk posed by A2AD systems[13] causes the United States to employ its military power in a more conservative manner, allies and adversaries do not feel as reassured[14] or threatened, respectively, in these short-of-war actions.[15] This provides the adversaries with an opportunity that they readily exploit.

The sub-threshold actions are designed to raise tensions and create friction points. This is done in a manner that is weakly attributable (the action) to the adversarial nation.[16] It causes aggravation for the allied nation (i.e., allied leaders face a political cost for not being able to stop these actions) and makes the United States appear ineffective because we cannot stop these actions, despite our economic and military might.[17] Therefore, it sends a message that aligning with our adversaries can be politically safer for regional actors.

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[11]   "NATO Air Chief 'Concerned' by Russia's Deployment of SAMs," Military.com, September 19. 2016, http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/09/19/nato-air-chief-concerned-by-russias-deployment-of-sams.html.

[12]   William Courtney and Christopher Paul, "Firehose of Falsehoods: Russian Propaganda Is Pervasive, and America Is Behind the Power Curve in Countering It," *U.S. News & World Report* (September 9, 2016). http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-09-09/putins-propaganda-network-is-vast-and-us-needs-new-tools-to-counter-it.

[13]   Our assumption is that, in a war, American forces are capable of defeating these systems.

[14]   The presence of American forces may still act as a deterrent against outright military action by an adversary (e.g., the presence of the Stryker Brigade in the Baltics) because even a small contingent of American forces implies that the conflict will widen if our forces are harmed.

[15]   Because the assets are viewed as vulnerable, the perceived cost of using them is raised. "NATO Air Chief 'Concerned' by Russia's Deployment of SAMs," Military.com.

[16]   The adversary needs others to know it was responsible (without allowing direct evidence of attribution), since the ultimate goal is to influence the political costs within the target and non-target nation in order to make them more compliant to the adversary nation.

[17]   "China's 'Little Blue Men' Take Navy's Place in Disputes," DefenseNews.com, November 2, 2015, http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/11/02/china-lassen-destroyer-spratly-islands-south-china-sea-andrew-erickson-naval-war-college-militia-coast-guard-navy-confrontation-territorial-dispute/75070058/; Eli Lake, "China's 'little green boats' make big waves," *The Post and Courier*, September 2, 2016, http://www.postandcourier.com/20160902/160909926/chinas-little-green-boats-make-big-waves.

Over time, this lays the foundation for our adversaries to establish dominance, as they now control the escalation and de-escalation of issues within a region.

The information campaigns, buttressed by minimally threatening physical demonstrations, are designed to influence the internal political costs of the adversaries, the United States, and allied/partner nations. Internally focused (from our adversaries' perspective) information campaigns are designed to maintain internal political support (or at least train the populace to discount external information feeds). In essence, this is propaganda leveraging the technical and social science techniques of the modern age. The external information campaign is targeted toward increasing US or allied/partner political costs. In particular, the purpose is to create sufficient confusion about the nature of events in the US electorate (as opposed to political leaders or the intelligence community) such that political leaders will view the cost of immediate action to be politically unacceptable.[18] In essence, the goal is to undercut US and allied options by undercutting democratic support rather than confusing the intelligence apparatus. By imposing political costs on the US, this strategy can be successful even if intelligence agencies have perfect information regarding events. In addition, for actions that require coordination amongst allies or partners, the information campaign has to be successful against only a small number of actors within the alliance, in which case these tactics can be supplemented through targeted blackmail/threats (e.g., economic blackmail that targets vulnerable but powerful constituents) to further increase the political costs and thereby diminish the potential of an alliance to act in a coordinated fashion.

This pernicious integrated approach is low-cost and effective. It sends a signal to regional leaders that it can be politically advantageous to side with our adversaries or at least be neutral.

2. Consequences

As many analyses have shown, the United States could prevail or reach a long-run equilibrium when confronted with just the A2AD systems.[19] However, when A2AD, sub-threshold actions, and information campaigns are combined, we assess that our adversaries' strategy gives them the advantage and reduces US options.

The US military is structured to be an expeditionary force that can project power and produce a wide range of effects across the globe. Because of the geographic location of the

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[18] "MH17 missile 'came from Russia', Dutch-led investigators say," BBC News, last updated September 28, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37495067.

[19] Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia." *International Security* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2016), 7–48, doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00249; and David C. Gompert, Astrid Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garafola, "War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable." Report RR-1140-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), doi: 10.7249/RR1140.

United States, the US military depends on an extensive network of bases and ports to support our power projection capabilities. Many of these bases and ports are located in and supported by partner and allied nations.

Our adversaries' approach is designed to incentivize our allies to either become neutral or side with them. This will further degrade the US military's ability to act as an instrument of power by making it more costly to employ it. In turn, this reduces the set of options available to the National Command Authority to manage and sustain the international order.

In addition, the United States' offensive conventional force provides a strong conventional deterrence. However, because our adversaries' strategy is designed to stay short of war, our conventional deterrence may need to be augmented to deal with this threat.

C. How to Support an Orderly Rise of Nations

The United States supports an orderly transition of power among nations. Part of this is a desire for peaceful and stable transitions whereby rising powers uphold and follow international norms. Achieving this outcome is particularly challenging because our adversaries' purposeful subversions of these international norms are sub-threshold and structured to avoid a war with the United States.

The political science literature offers a potential solution.[20] Democracies and autocratic regimes can reach agreements by exploiting the fact that they have different political audiences. Thus, if adversaries' leaders can be convinced that they will pay a high political price for violating international norms, they can also be convinced to support an orderly rise.

The challenge for the military is to provide the National Command Authority with political leverage in these short-of-war adversarial contests. The US military can do this by being able to credibly threaten important political issues that the adversaries' power base cares about. If DoD can hold an adversaries' political standing at risk, they may be willing to privately negotiate and give up attempts to undermine international norms.[21] At the moment this idea needs further consideration and development by the operational community to understand its feasibility and implementation path.

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[20] Yevgeniy Kirpichevsky and Phillip Y. Lipscy, "The Dark Side of Democratic Advantage: International Crises and Secret Agreements" (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, May 2009). http://stanford.edu /~plipscy/papersecretagreements.pdf.

[21] This assumes we are not threatening their existence. See Dr. Jeffrey Record, *Japan's Decision for War in 1941: Some Enduring Lessons* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, February 2009).

What tools does the military need to control the escalation of political costs on our adversaries in these short-of-war contests? Is a symmetrical or asymmetrical approach better?[22] If new systems or operational concepts are needed, what is the cost? What are the operational constraints?[23] In these contests, for what set of issues is the military not the right instrument of power? When is it better to not engage?[24] Political issues and power bases can change over time; is DoD agile enough to rapidly assess and stay ahead of these changes? Is DoD transparent enough with our allies and adversaries about its ability to impose political costs?[25]

As CJCS General Joseph Dunford recently indicated,[26] taking a broader and integrated view of these adversarial approaches will have implications for DoD's planning and resourcing process. Going beyond Gen. Dunford's comments, we ask if there are other internal business processes that limit the ability of DoD to find creative solutions to our adversaries' attempt to undermine international norms. Are there seams between DoD and other government organizations that need to be closed in order to produce the desired effects? One often cited example is the underfunding of the State Department, even when its activities could have a large impact on DoD. Another seam that directly bears on this paper is the interface between DoD and the intelligence community on understanding the political power base within our adversaries.

D. Other Factors and Policy Considerations

Counters to the adversaries' externally driven information campaigns may be required, as they may limit the actions the National Command Authority may consider acceptable. This can constrain the effectiveness of the military as an instrument of power.

While the United States has the world's preeminent military, its capacity to respond is finite. Thus, any approach taken should be complemented with a strategy to strengthen

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[22] "Symmetrical response simply means reacting to threats to the balance of power at the same location, time, and level of the original provocation. Asymmetrical response involves shifting the location or nature of one's reaction onto terrain better suited to the application of one's strength against adversary weakness." See Joshua M. Epstein, "Horizontal Escalation: Sour Notes of a Recurrent Theme," *International Security* 8, no. 3 (Winter, 1983–1984): 19–31, doi: 10.2307/2538698.

[23] The United States and its leadership have a finite capacity to manage and address issues. Therefore a single (or small set) of issues that consumes the vast majority of our capacity presents an opportunity for our adversaries to exploit. See Jacqueline N. Deal, "Prospects for Peace: The View from Beijing," *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 7–12, http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters /issues/Summer_2016/4_Deal.pdf.

[24] John Lewis Gaddis, "Containment: Its Past and Future," *International Security* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1981): 80.

[25] Transparency is important; otherwise, the adversary may miscalculate and decide that violating international norms is a good strategy.

[26] Dunford, Keynote Address, Air Force Association (AFA) Air, Space and Cyber Conference.

our allies—for example, helping them develop and employ limited range and capability A2AD systems. The intent is to raise the costs (to the adversaries) of acting against a smaller allied or partner nation but not necessarily to provide our partners and allies with regime-threatening capability. Weapons such as short-range land-based anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), and wide area munitions all provide increased defensive capability against power projection threats.

E. Concluding Thoughts

An integrated examination of our adversaries' strategy suggests that they are engaging in a contest that stays short of war but has the power to disrupt or dismantle our alliances. Their actions are designed to increase the political costs on allies while limiting the ability of the United States to respond. This poses a threat to our ability to project power because the military is heavily dependent on infrastructure supported by our partners and allies.

We propose that for the military to be an effective instrument of power in these short-of-war conflicts, it needs to be able to escalate and produce effects in the political dimension. This leverage can then be used by the National Command Authority to negotiate a private agreement with our adversaries to follow international norms.

This is one avenue that can be exploited to counter our adversaries' attempt to undermine our military power and the international order. However, it needs further development and invites a broader discussion on its merits. In the end, it is incumbent on the entire national security community to provide a unified approach to this growing menace.

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Abbreviations

A2AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
AFA	Air Force Association
DoD	Department of Defense
IDA	Institute for Defense Analyses
IO	Information Operations
IRC	Information-Related Capability
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
US	United States

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